

November 2018: Skimmia
Garden Plant of the Month

Skimmia, the four season wonder

This shrub (officially called *Skimmia japonica*) constantly manifests itself in new ways throughout the year. In November the plant displays the buds of its sturdy, attractive flower spikes. The colour and the buds continue to look beautiful all winter long. In April/May the buds open and *Skimmia* flowers with white/pink flowers with a strong scent: bees love them. The first new buds appear at the end of August. And one constant is the leathery leaves that remain beautifully green throughout the year.

Range

The *Skimmia* range has expanded in recent years with many new cultivars. They vary in terms of the colour of the bud, the leaf colour (green or variegated) and the compactness of the plant. There are both compact dwarf *Skimmias* and specimens that have a much larger, looser shape. The most common cultivar of *Skimmia japonica* is 'Rubella', with its red buds. There are also other red varieties such as 'Rubesta', 'Rubinetta' and 'Red Dwarf'. Plants with green/white buds are: 'Finchy', 'White Globe', 'White Dwarf', 'Godries Dwarf Green', 'Fragrant Cloud' (scented). Some red berry-bearing *Skimmias* are: 'Pabella', 'Obession', 'Veitchii' and 'Temptation'.

Skimmia trivia

- The first *Skimmia* came to Europe in 1838 and ended up in the greenhouses of Kew Gardens.
- The Latin name was created in 1784 from 'Miyama shikimi', the Japanese name for *Skimmia*.
- *Skimmia japonica* 'Pabella' is a cousin of *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella', which is known for its beautiful sprays of flowers.
- For the plant to thrive in your garden, you need to place a male *Skimmia* alongside a couple of ladies to ensure pollination. The male plant can be identified by its shape, it flowers slightly more vigorously and the flowers have pistils.

Origin

Skimmia is a member of the rue family (Rutaceae), which also includes citrus trees. The family resemblance is clear from the leaves: if you crush them, it releases a citrus fragrance. In the wild *Skimmia* grows in the forest of China and other parts of Asia such as the Himalayas. However, the version in your garden was created in a Dutch greenhouse.

What to look for when buying

- Check the balance between pot size, the number of stems per pot, the shape of the plant and the number of buds on the plant.
- *Skimmia* is only offered with coloured buds in November. These buds have formed in August, and will retain their marvellous colour until they flower in April. There's therefore no need to check the ripeness in November.

Sales and display tips

Skimmia is a perfect transition plant between all the red and orange of early autumn and the approaching December festivities. Highlighted alongside other autumn successes such as heather and ivy, and supplement the display with some home accessories that match the season, such as lanterns, a boot jack and a rake. Because Skimmia is a popular front door plant (one either side of the door) it's a good idea to display the plants symmetrically, already placed in an attractive pot or zinc bucket.

Care tips for customers

- Skimmia prefers to be in the shade where the berries will develop best.
- The plant prefers a lightly acidic soil such as rhododendron soil.
- If the leaves turn yellow the soil is not acidic enough.
- Skimmia does not like having wet feet, and therefore likes to be planted near trees that draw a lot of moisture out of the soil. In pots the water must be able to drain away.
- It's better not to cut branches off the plant since that will harm the next flowering.
- Skimmia is moderately hardy, and only needs to be wrapped in fleece or bubblewrap during hard frosts.

Garden Plant of the Month

Skimmia is the Garden Plant for November 2018. The 'Garden Plant of the Month' is an initiative from the Flower Council of Holland. Every month the Flower Council works with representatives of the floriculture sector to choose a plant with an amazing look or unusual characteristics to put in the spotlight. Sometimes it will be a green star that's highlighted, and sometimes an undiscovered treasure that deserves to be better known and merits a place in the garden, on the patio or on the balcony. Because everyone is happier with more plants.

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Photo caption

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